



Blanche MacIntosh

Also Known As:

Blanche MacIntosh Hubbard, Blanche Mary MacIntosh, Blanche McIntosh

Lived:

July 19, 1877 - November 18, 1954

Worked as:

adapter, reader, scenario writer, screenwriter

Worked In:

United Kingdom: England

by **Simon Brown**

Blanche MacIntosh is a familiar name thanks to her adaptation of Helen Mather's novel *Comin' Thro' the Rye* (1923) for Cecil Hepworth, a film often discussed as a key example of British silent cinema. The film though tends to be viewed as primarily Hepworth's work, leaving MacIntosh's contribution unexplored. Yet from 1912 until 1924 Blanche MacIntosh wrote twenty-eight films for Hepworth, and for the latter part of this period she was his chief scenario writer. When and why she assumed this role is one of the many mysteries about her life and her industry role.

The first mystery is the spelling of her surname, which was routinely printed in the trade press as well as in later histories as either McIntosh or MacIntosh. In fact she was born Blanche Mary MacIntosh on July 19, 1877, in Marylebone, London. She married in September 1908, becoming Blanche MacIntosh Hubbard, but would retain her maiden name as a nom de plume for her screenwriting work. Far from being a professional writer, MacIntosh was a Hepworth family friend. According to Hepworth's memoirs, he first met her on holiday in Deal in 1891 when the Hepworth and MacIntosh families formed a lasting friendship (25). The young Blanche showed an aptitude for writing although according to the 1901 UK census, she was working from home as a second class clerk in the civil service. Some time after her marriage and before the birth of her second daughter Lorna in 1913, she left the civil service and moved from Marylebone to Clarence Road in Hersham, which is a walk of about fifteen minutes from the Hepworth Studios in Walton on Thames. She was almost certainly living there when, in 1912, Hepworth asked her to write a scenario for a film that became *In Wolf's Clothing* (1912). We could conjecture that Hepworth knew her as a family friend whom he turned to when his writer-director Lewin Fitzhamon, who had been with him since 1903, left to start his own company. Hepworth's request marked the beginning of a working relationship that lasted until the company went bankrupt in 1924. Further

proof of her commitment to scenario writing by virtue of her friendship with Hepworth is the fact that after the bankruptcy, MacIntosh wrote no further films.

There are no records documenting MacIntosh's arrangement with Hepworth, although some details can be sketched out here thanks to the memory of her daughter, Lorna Hubbard, who was interviewed for this article shortly before her death in 2007. It is not clear whether MacIntosh was a full-time employee or paid by the script, but according to her daughter, she worked from home, visiting the studio infrequently. Lorna also described her as a professional reader whose job it was to analyze books in an effort to determine whether they would make suitable films. MacIntosh's husband George Joseph Hubbard regularly checked out books for her from the Mudie Library, and when she found one suitable for adaptation, she took the idea to Hepworth.

In this respect, MacIntosh was distinct from some if not all the other Hepworth writers. Sometime between 1912 and 1914, Hepworth created a permanent scenario department at his studio, hiring scenario writers like Blanche and scenario editors, like Victor Montefiore, who also wrote, but would in addition routinely read scenarios sent in by members of the public, submissions actively encouraged by the studio via both the *Hepworth Picture Play Paper* (6) and the trade press (Elliott).

Only four of the films Blanche MacIntosh wrote survived, three in incomplete versions and one in a format which is not viewable; thus, in order to assess her work, it is necessary to rely upon secondary sources such as reviews and press books. MacIntosh was not particularly prolific, with five scenarios in 1916 constituting the maximum for any one year. She was, however, versatile. She adapted plays such as Pinero's 1916 "Trelawney of the Wells" and George Sims's 1915 "Nightbirds of London" and novels such as *Molly Bawn* (1916) by Mrs Hungerford and *Sheba* by "Rita." She also wrote scenarios based on original ideas by Hepworth Company performers including Tom Powers—*Morphia the Death Drug* (1914)—and Henry Edwards—*The Failure/Dick Carson Wins Through* (1917). Although she adapted comedies including *Alf's Button* (1920), *Once Aboard the Lugger* (1920), and *Mrs Erricker's Reputation* (1920), MacIntosh was clearly more interested in melodrama. Of the six original stories that she herself wrote for the screen, four are melodramas, namely *Blind Fate* (1914), *The Canker of Jealousy/Be Sure Your Sins* (1915), *The Baby on the Barge* (1915), and *Love in a Mist* (1916).

It is difficult to assess the cultural impact of her work, but her status as the chief scenario writer at the most quintessentially English silent era production company challenges us to pursue this question. Hepworth famously described his films as "English pictures, with all the English countryside for background and with English atmosphere and English idiom throughout" (Hepworth 144), and this notion of English-ness has infused much of the commentary on his output so that the majority of writing on the surviving Hepworth films credit Hepworth as the driving force behind them, retrospectively elevating the producer-director to auteur status. Yet because of Hepworth's stated aversion to screenwriting, it is interesting to consider how much he relied upon his writers to create his trademark atmosphere. Apparently, MacIntosh's work was rarely changed by Hepworth (Hepworth 139–40), and in an article from the Hepworth Company

magazine entitled “The Author and the Film,” reprinted in the *Bioscope* in August 1921, Hepworth asserted that “there is no real line of demarcation or place where it can be said ‘Here the author’s work ends and here the producer’s begins’” (33).

This begs the question as to how MacIntosh and Hepworth worked together. In the pamphlet *Writing Screen Plays*, Alfred Hitchcock’s screenwriter Eliot Stannard is quoted as saying that “if you can find [a producer] whose temperament is in harmony with your own... your joint work should express all that is best in each of you” (Stannard 24). Was MacIntosh in this sense “harmonizing” her ideas and his or just attuning herself to Hepworth’s style and preoccupations? Or did she play an even more active part in creating this “English” atmosphere?

For example, the most detailed study of any Hepworth film on which MacIntosh is credited is Andrew Higson’s analysis of *Comin’ Thro’ the Rye* (1923). Higson compares the novel and the film and notes that “Hepworth’s aesthetic sensibility does not really seem suited to the passions of the novel” (73). To prove this he cites the use of tableau staging in long shots as less able to create a psychological space for the audience than the novel with its first-person, present-tense narration. The long shot instead encourages the audience to admire a nostalgic pastiche of Victoriana, he argues. However, Higson does not take into consideration how MacIntosh adapted Mathers’s long, detailed, and subtly feminist novel. Indeed he never mentions MacIntosh at all, but it was she who firstly interpreted the text through her adaptation. There are many facts that indicate that we should reconsider the extent to which changes from novel to film are the result of Hepworth’s style choices or of MacIntosh’s adaptation: The fact that MacIntosh did seem to be influential in determining the Hepworth Company vision, that Hepworth did not change her scripts, as well as that his stated opinion was that there was no demarcation between writer and producer. For example, in the transition to the screen, the character of Helen Adair’s father has been softened, his nickname changed from the oppressive “governor” of the novel into the much more informal “guv’nor.” This change downplays the image of patriarchal authority in favor of curmudgeonly paternity, adding to the nostalgic feel that Higson attributes to Hepworth. But to what extent was this decision made in the scenario stage, and did Hepworth have any input into the scenario or not? Given the legacy of pioneer director-producer Hepworth, it is surely important to acknowledge the contributions of this key collaborator.

Blanche Mary MacIntosh Hubbard died in 1954, aged seventy-seven, in Hersham, not far from the site of the Hepworth Company studio at Walton on Thames.

Bibliography

“The Author and the Film: Cecil Hepworth States the Producer’s Case.” *Bioscope* (18 Aug. 1921): 6.

“*Blind Fate*.” *Bioscope Supplement* (1 January 1914): vii.

Elliott, William J. “The Picture Playwright.” *Bioscope* (3 June 1915): 955.

Hepworth, Cecil. *Came The Dawn: Memories of a Film Pioneer*. London: Phoenix House, 1951.

“A Hepworth Mystery Melodrama: *An American Heiress*.” *Bioscope* (8 Feb 1917): 615.

Hepworth Picture Play Paper (Nov. 1916): 6.

Higson, Andrew. *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1997.

Hubbard, Lorna. Interview with Simon Brown. 16 August 2007.

Mathers, Helen. *Comin’ Thro’ the Rye*. 158th edition. London: Herbert Jenkins, n.d.

Stannard, Eliot. “Writing Screen Plays.” In *Cinema – in Ten Complete Lessons*. London: Standard Art Book Company, 1920.

“*Time—the Great Healer*.” Rev. *Bioscope* (29 Oct. 1914): 468–9.

Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Blanche MacIntosh as Scenario Writer

The Vicar of Wakefield. Dir.: Frank Wilson, sc./adp.: Blanche MacIntosh (Hepworth Manufacturing Company, Ltd., United Kingdom 1913) cas.: Violet Hopson, Harry Royston, Warwick Buckland, Chrissie White, si, b&w; 28mm, 3,400ft. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

The Failure/Dick Carson Wins Through. Dir.: Henry Edwards, sc./adp: Blanche MacIntosh (Hepworth Picture Plays, Ltd., United Kingdom 1917) cas.: Henry Edwards, Chrissie White, si, b&w; 812 ft. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

Alf’s Button. Dir.: Cecil Hepworth, sc./adp: Blanche MacIntosh (Hepworth Picture Plays, Ltd., United Kingdom 1920) cas.: Leslie Henson, Alma Taylor, James Carew, Eileen Dennes, si, b&w; 35mm. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

Comin’ Thro’ The Rye. Dir.: Cecil Hepworth, sc./adp: Blanche MacIntosh (Hepworth Picture Plays 1923, Ltd., United Kingdom 1923) cas.: Alma Taylor, Shayle Gardner, Eileen Dennes, si, b&w; 35mm, 6,788ft incomplete. Archive: [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#).

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

[↑ Return to top](#)

1. Blanche MacIntosh as Scenario Writer

In Wolf’s Clothing, 1912; *The Heart of Midlothian*, 1914; *Morphia the Death Drug*, 1914; *Nightbirds of London*, 1915; *Molly Bawn*, 1916; *Sowing the Wind*, 1916; *Trelawney of the Wells*,

1916; *The Cobweb*, 1917; *The Touch of a Child*, 1918; *Forest on the Hill*, 1919; *Sheba*, 1919; *Anna the Adventuress*, 1920; *Helen of the Four Gates*, 1920; *Once Aboard the Lugger*, 1920; *Mrs Erricker's Reputation*, 1920; *Mr. Justice Raffles*, 1921; *The Tinted Venus*, 1921.

2. Blanche MacIntosh as Original Story and Scenario Writer

Blind Fate, 1914; *Time*, *The Great Healer*, 1914; *The Baby on the Barge*, 1915; *The Canker of Jealousy*/*Be Sure Your Sins*, 1915; *Love in a Mist*, 1916; *The American Heiress*, 1917.

Credit Report

The Library of Congress has two 28 mm versions of *The Vicar of Wakefield*: a 3,400 ft. print and a 2,450 ft. print. The BFI has only a 812 ft. section of *The Failure/Dick Carson Wins Through*, and its print of *Comin' Thro' The Rye* is incomplete. The BFI has a 2,014 ft. print of *Alf's Button*, but only a 714 ft. section is available for viewing.

Citation

Brown, Simon. "Blanche MacIntosh." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds. *Women Film Pioneers Project*. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2013.
<<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-blanche-macintosh/>>